



Stepping House

Sheridan, D., & McMenamin, D. (2006). Stepping House. In *Modern Ulster Architecture* (pp. 154-155). Ulster Architectural Heritage.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Published in:
Modern Ulster Architecture

Publication Status:
Published (in print/issue): 01/10/2006

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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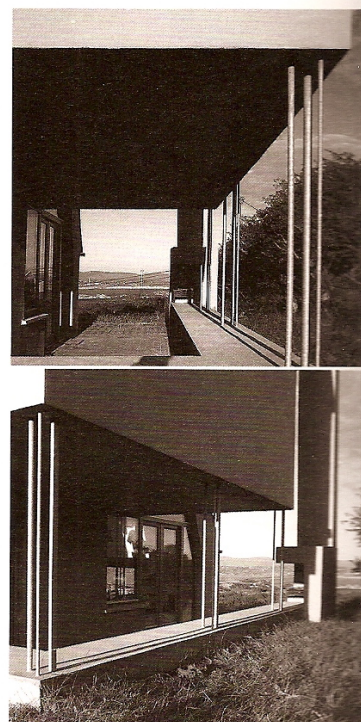
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Stepping House

ARÁINN MHÓR ISLAND CO DONEGAL
LID ARCHITECTURE: DOUGAL SHERIDAN, DEIRDRE MCMENAMIN 2005

Sited on an island off the western coast of Co Donegal, this small house feels as though it is caught somewhere between the influence of the vernacular and a desire to harmonise with the tough landscape peppered with wind-stripped rock outcrops in which it is sited. Where other comparably sized homes on the island take the simple pitched-roof form as their parti, this house takes its inspiration from the rugged terrain that seems forever unwelcoming to any gesture of habitation. The angular forms of the

house allude to those of a great boulder, chipped and eroded but finally settled into the landscape as though tumbled down to its final site.

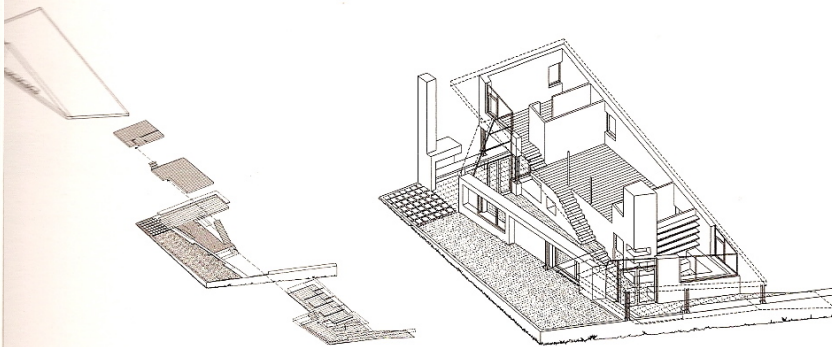
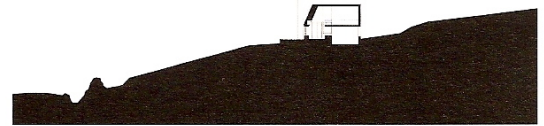
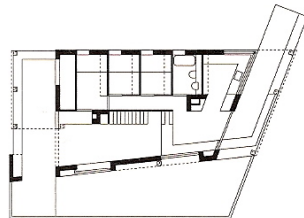
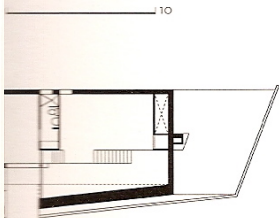
The internal arrangement of the house can also be understood in terms of landscape and topography – a series of internal terraces, duplicating the incline of the hillside on which the house sits, is the dominating organisational device. To make your way from bed to breakfast table is to go down the hill whilst the split level around

the seating area imitates the rocky outcrop nearby. The artificial or constructed landscape is a theme in contemporary architecture that runs through the work of other Irish practices such as MacGabhann Architects (see p.140). What is interesting here is the immediacy of the relationship of the house to the untouched ground around it – an abrupt quality that seems appropriately direct for this place where precision and beauty of finish must give way to a pragmatic robustness. Whilst two terraces sit sheltered within the mass

References

Clark, K. *Landscape into art*. London: J. Murray, 1976.

Mackel, C. Stepping house, Aráinn Mhor. *Perspective*, 14(5), 2005, 46-53.



of the main building, only a single grassed terrace, elevated a few feet above the wild terrain, extends outward to engage the landscape proper.

Despite its small area this house has a generous feel achieved by the loose definition of the internal-to-external areas. In one sense the horizon defines the edge of the occupants' world when sitting in the sheltered outdoor terrace with the fireplace and the uppermost bedroom overhanging above. In other areas, however, the house

feels snuggler and internalised giving a sense of protection underneath the sculpted internal form of the roof. Externally, the roof is lined with corrugated fibre-cement sheets – a material more usually associated with low-key agricultural buildings.

There is an undertone of deference to, and acceptance or even respect of, the physical severity of the island, which sits on the very edge of Europe, braced against the Atlantic. Rather than presenting a picturesque ideal of beauty, there is a kind

of poetic crudeness to this house. To quote Kenneth Clark, one of the architect's own favourite references for the project: 'Nature... is still disturbing, vast and fearful; and lays open the mind to many dangerous thoughts'.